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By GEORGE HOUGHTON.

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NIAGARA



AND OTHER POEMS

GEORGE HOUGHTON



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## PART FIRST.

### NIAGARA.



#### I.

#### INTRODUCTION.

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5

FORMED when the oceans were fashioned, when all  
the world was a workshop ;

Loud roared the furnace fires, and tall leapt the  
smoke from volcanoes,

Scooped were round bowls for lakes, and grooves  
for the sliding of rivers,

Whilst, with a cunning hand, the mountains were  
linkéd together.

Then through the day-dawn, lurid with cloud, and  
rent by forked lightning,

Stricken by earthquake beneath, above by the rat-  
tle of thunder,

Sudden the clamor was pierced by a voice, deep-  
lunged and portentous, —

Thine, O Niagara, crying : “ Now is creation com-  
pleted ! ”

## II.

Millions of cup-like blossoms, brimming with dew  
and with rain-drops,  
Mingle their tributes together to form one slow-  
trickling brooklet ;  
Thousands of brooklets and rills, leaping down  
from their homes in the uplands,  
Grow to a smooth blue river, serene, and flowing in  
silence.

Hundreds of smooth blue rivers, flashing afar o'er  
the prairies,  
Darkening 'neath forests of pine, deep drowning  
the reeds in the marshes,  
Cleaving with noiseless sledge the rocks red-cruised  
with copper,  
Circle at last to one common goal, the Mighty Sea-  
Water.

Lo ! to the northward outlying, wide glimmers the  
stretch of the Great-Lake,  
White-capped and sprinkled with foam, that tum-  
bles its bellowing breakers  
Landward on beaches of sand, and in hiding-holes  
hollow with thunder,  
Landward where plovers frequent, with the wolf  
and the westering bison.

Four such Sea-Waters as this, a chain of green  
land-bounden oceans,  
Pour into one their tides, ever yearning to greet the  
Atlantic,  
Press to one narrow sluice, and proffering their  
tribute of silver,  
Cry as they come : " Receive us, Niagara, Father  
of Waters ! "

Such is the Iroquois god, the symbol of might and  
of plenty,  
Shrine of the untutored brave, subdued by an unfathomed longing,  
Seeking in water and wind, still seeking in star-glow and lightning,  
Something to kneel to, something to pray to, something to worship.

Here, when the world was wreathed with the scarlet and gold of October,  
Here, from far-scattered camps, came the moccasined tribes of the red-man,  
Left in their tents their bows, forgot their brawls and dissensions,  
Ringed thee with peaceful fires, and over their calumets pondered ;



Chose from their fairest virgins the fairest and  
purest among them,  
Hollowed a birchen canoe, and fashioned a seat  
for the virgin,  
Clothed her in white, and set her adrift to whirl to  
thy bosom,  
Saying: "Receive this our vow, Niagara, Father of  
Waters!"

## III.

## THE PILGRIM.

Pilgrim I too once came, to tender my token of  
homage,  
I too once stood on thy wooded banks, my heart  
filled with wonder,  
I too would render some gift, some tribute of song  
and of harp-strings,  
But 'neath the roll of thy wheels, my shepherd's  
flute was o'ermastered.

Calling, thou seemest to murmur: "Come, and I  
will instruct thee!"  
Willing I ran, like a palmer of old, with his pike-  
staff and wallet,

Willing I lingered long, to go but to turn on the  
morrow,  
Coming again and again, — yet only to doubt the  
more deeply

Idol I found thee, unfeeling, challenging man but  
to mock him,  
Whispering to one that is weak of voids that are  
vast and almighty,  
Hinting of things heaven-high to one not winged  
like an eagle,  
Telling of changeless parts to a leaflet that reddens  
to perish ;

Ever, as nearer I fared, the mightier, less merciful  
found thee,  
Till, after listening long, I faltered, forlorn and dis-  
heartened ;  
Wearied of ceaseless strife, and yearned for some  
peaceful seclusion,  
Where to the chorusing throng both ear and eye  
might be shuttered ;

Hated the turmoil of life, where sounds that are  
sweetest are strangled,  
And into discord clash those martial measures, that  
struggling,

Should through the din of the dimmallest fight, with  
quavering echoes,  
Nerve the warrior anew, and fire his soul with devotion.

Turning toward far-off fields, I fled, till stopping  
to listen,  
Only dull undertones told that still thou wert calling  
and calling ;  
Wept, and wished it mid-winter, that muffled in  
snows of December,  
All the world might be smothered in silence utterly  
soundless ;

Wished like a Druid to hie to some mountain-top  
shorn and unsheltered,  
Where, in their wildest flights, the riotous winds  
might be stifled,  
Finding no hollow reed through which to pipe their  
bravuras,  
Finding no trembling twig on which to twang their  
lamentings

Then, as I crost a meadow-land, dight with mallow  
and daisies,  
Heard the low bumble of bees, and the delicate  
footsteps of robins

That o'er the crispy leaves of the scrub-oak coverts  
 went hopping,  
 Suddenly — who shall explain it? — faith returned  
 to my bosom ;

Suddenly hope revived, the fog from the fens was  
 uplifted,  
 Lost was the din of life that stormed and roared  
 in the roadways,  
 Calm were the grassy fields, a lullaby purred  
 through the willows,  
 And overhead the night was illumined with flicker-  
 ing beacons.

IV.

Often, in later years, allured by thy strange fascina-  
 tion,  
 Often again I have come, with feet that would not  
 turn backward,  
 Often knelt at thy feet, and sought with a lover's  
 persistence,  
 Whether, beneath thy dolorous fugue, one promise  
 was whispered.

Hope there was none for me ; august was the deep  
diapason,  
But 't was the moan of the sea, the growl of the  
forest unfeeling,  
Threat of the sulphurous skies, that when they are  
fevered and angry  
Volley the world with flame and curse mankind  
with their laughter.

## V.

## THE UPPER RAPIDS.

Still, with the wonder of boyhood, I follow the race  
of thy Rapids,  
Sirens that dance, and allure to destruction, — now  
lurking in shadows,  
Skirting the level stillness of pools and the treach-  
erous shallows,  
Smiling and dimple-mouthed, coquetting, — now  
modest, now forward ;

Tenderly chanting, and such the thrall of the weird  
incantation,  
Thirst it awakes in each listener's soul, a feverish  
longing,

Thoughts all-absorbent, a torment that stings and  
 ever increases,  
 Burning ambition to push bare-breast to thy peril-  
 ous bosom.

Thus, in some midnight obscure, bent down by the  
 storm of temptation  
 (So hath the wind, in the beechen wood, confided  
 the story),  
 Pine-trees, thrusting their way and trampling down  
 one another,  
 Curious, lean and listen, replying in sobs and in  
 whispers ;

Till of the secret possessed, which brings sure  
 blight to the hearer  
 (So hath the wind, in the beechen wood, confided  
 the story),  
 Faltering, they stagger brinkward, — clutch at the  
 roots of the grasses,  
 Cry, — a pitiful cry of remorse, — and plunge down  
 in the darkness.

Art thou all-merciless then, — a fiend, ever fierce  
 for new victims ?  
 Was then the red-man right (as yet it liveth in  
 legend),

That, ere each twelvemonth circles, still to thy  
shrine is allotted  
Blood of one human heart, as sacrifice due and  
demanded ?

Butterflies have I followed, that leaving the red-top  
and clover,  
Thinking a wind-harp thy voice, thy froth the fresh  
whiteness of daisies,  
Ventured too close, grew giddy, and catching cold  
drops on their pinions,  
Balanced — but vainly, — and falling, their scarlet  
was blotted forever.

## VI.

## THE CATARACT.

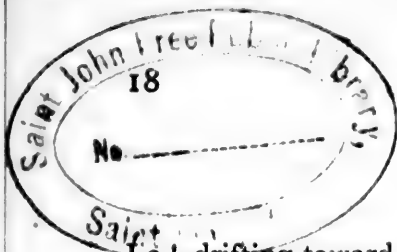
Still to thy Fall I come near, as unto earth's grand-  
est cathedral,  
Forehead uncovered, hands down, with feet that  
falter beneath me ;  
Hearing afar, o'er the rustling grass and the rush  
of the river,  
Chorus triumphant, thy trumpet voice, and I trem-  
ble with weakness.

Tall above tower and tree looms thy steeple builded  
 of sunshine,  
 Mystical steeple, white like a cloud, upyearning  
 toward heaven,  
 Till into cloud-land it drifts, uprolling in hill-tops  
 and headlands,  
 Catches the glory of sunset, then pales into rose-  
 tint and purple.

Slowly, through gothic aisles, I creep to the steps  
 of thine altar,  
 Halfway forgetting thy presence, though still with  
 each step I draw nearer,  
 Halfway forgetting thy voice, so far it sends fancy  
 awandering,  
 Till, with a sudden ascent, full-face thou standest  
 before me.

Who, upon tiptoes straining, shall snare the fleet  
 course of the comet !  
 Who in bright pigments shall match the luminous  
 sun-god at mid-day !  
 Who shall dare picture in words the turbulent  
 wrath of the tempest !  
 Seeing, I can but stand still, with finger on lip, and  
 keep silent.





NIAGARA.

VII.

Lo! drifting toward us approaches a curious tangle  
of something!

White and untillered it floats, bewitching the sight,  
and appearing

Like to a birchen canoe, a virgin crouched pallid  
within it,

Hastening with martyr zeal to solve the unriddled  
hereafter!

Slower and smoother her flight, until on the preci-  
pice pausing,

Just for the space of a breath the dread of the  
change seems to thrill her;

Crossing herself, and seeming to shudder, she lifts  
eyes to heaven, —

Sudden a mist upwhirls — I see not — but know  
all is over.

Stoop and explore the void where this vision of  
fancy hath vanished!

Torrents of green and blue drench down the dizzy  
escarpment,

Fall into scattered flakes, and merge into fury of  
snow-squalls ;

Crisp like glaciers they shatter, then smoke in the  
whirl of the vortex.

Stoop and look down ! and read, if you can, the  
terrible riddle !

Nay ! the secret of death by death's eyes alone  
can be fathomed ;

But o'er the mystery finished is fluttered the curtain  
Most Holy,

And on this curtain is set the sign of redemption  
— a rainbow !

Symbol of hope is this, or merely man's hopeful  
invention ?

Thou hast no answer to that, beyond this dull un-  
dertone moaning :

“ Man of all animate things the noblest, most  
meanly ignoble,

Smiling only to tempt, and spoiling whate'er he  
embraces ! ”

Is then thy bow we clasp'd as pledge of a promise  
unfailing,

Naught but a sun-dog ferocious, that mouthing the  
mariner's noonday,

Kisses with lying lips the soft-sleeping clouds of  
midsummer,  
Only to taunt him, lulled by the calm, with an am-  
bushed tornado ?

Faith in thee have I none ! I lift spent eyes, and  
despairing,  
Set my teeth in defiance. Fate, then, the father of  
all things !  
I but a victim moth, to be snatched by a merciless  
current,  
Dragged by cold eddies down, to be lost and for-  
gotten forever !

Why then this pilgrimage here ? God knows no  
willful self-seeking  
Lent us this restless life ; and no faint-heart or re-  
bellion  
Gives us this fear to lie down, and rest in the slum-  
berous dreamland !  
— Answer, if answer thou hast ! Answer, Niagara !  
answer !

Weary with waiting, we climb to the hill-tops near-  
est to heaven,  
Find only floating fogs, and air too meagre to  
nourish ;

Seeking the depths of the sea, we drop our plum-  
 mets and feel them,  
 Draw them in empty, or yellowed with clay, that  
 melts and tells nothing ;

Forests we thread, wide prairies unfenced, and  
 drenchéd morasses,  
 Strike, with the fervor of youth, to the heart of the  
 tenantless deserts,  
 Turn every boulder, still hoping to find beneath  
 them some prophet, —  
 Find only thistles unsunn'd, green sloth, and pas-  
 sionless creatures.

Youth flitted by us, we faint, then sink in the ruts  
 of our fathers ;  
 Shift as we may with the old beliefs, and beat on  
 our bosoms ;  
 Seek less and hunger less keenly, still sorrow for  
 self and for others,  
 Striving, by travail and tears, life's deeper meaning  
 to strangle ;

Drag from sunset to sunset, too fainting to fear for  
 the morrow,  
 Suffer, complain of our loads, but catch at their  
 withes as they leave us,

Letting the song-birds escape, perceiving not till  
they 've fluttered, —  
Bitterly weeping then, as we watch them die in the  
distance.

Struggling, we snatch at straws ; call out, expecting  
no answer ;  
Pray, but without any faith ; grow laggard and  
laugh at our anguish ;  
Sin, and with wine-cup deadened, scoff at the dread  
of hereafter, —  
And, because all seems lost, besiege Death's door-  
way with gladness.

Better we had not been, for what is the goal of such  
striving ?  
Bubbles that glitter perchance, to burst in thin air  
as they glitter !  
Comets that cleave the night, to leave the night but  
the darker !  
Smudge that bursts into flame, but only in smoke  
to be smothered !

Out of the gifts of our spring, that only is beautiful  
counted  
Which with the day-dawn breaks bud, and dies ere  
the dew-drops have left it ;

Smiles there no healthfuller clime, where forms  
that are fair never perish,  
But in a life-giving ether grow fairer with ripening  
seasons ?

Iroquois god, I adore thee, because thou art lasting  
and mighty,  
Turn and gaze at thee, going, as on an all-marvel-  
ous vision,  
Dread thee, thou art so serene, — but hate thee  
with hatred most bitter,  
Taunter of all who dabble thy foam, and think to  
discover.

VIII.

THE GORGE.

'Neath the abyss lies the Valley, a valley of dark-  
ness, — a hades,  
Where the spent stream, as it strives, seeks only an  
end to its anguish ;  
Who shall its fastnesses fathom, or tell what wrecks  
they envelop ?  
Here 'neath the tides of time, life's remnants  
await resurrection.

Deep is the way, and weary the way, while lofty  
above it  
Frowns, upon either hand, a cliff sheer-shouldered  
or beetling,  
Holding in durance forever the course of the will-  
broken exile,  
Blighting all hope of return, should it pant for the  
flowering pastures.

But from the brinks lean down a few slender birches  
and cedars,  
Dazed by the depth and the gloom of the channel  
resounding beneath them ;  
Here campanulas, too, which lurk wherever is dan-  
ger,  
Stoop with a smile of hope, reflecting the blue of  
the heavens.

Fleeter still flies the flood, up-heaping its scum at  
the centre,  
Dragging the tides from the shores to leave them a  
hand-breadth the lower ;  
While, like a serpent of yellow, the spume crooks  
down to the Whirlpool,  
Trails with a zigzagging motion down to the hide-  
ous Whirlpool.

IX.

THE WHIRLPOOL.

Here is the end of all things, of all things another  
beginning.

Here the long valley crooks, and the flight of the  
river is broken ;

Round is the cavernous pool, and in at one side  
leaps the river,

Headlong it plunges, despairing, and beats on the  
bars of its prison ;

Beats, and runs wildly from wall to wall, then  
strives to recover,

Beats on another still, and around the circle is  
carried,

Jostled from shoulder to shoulder, till losing its  
galloping motion,

Dizzily round it swirls, and is dragged toward the  
hideous Whirlpool.

Lofty the rock-walls loom, the narrow outlet con-  
cealing,

Loftier still stoop pines, that shut out the pity of  
sunlight ;



Whilst above both a shadow, as if from the wings  
of a vulture,  
Sheds over all below a pall more spectral than  
midnight.

Up from the seething witch-pot arises a sulphurous  
vapor,  
Smoke-clouds slow-winged drift hither and hence,  
revealing, now hiding ;  
Whilst from the hollow depths, that hiss from some  
under-world fervor,  
Bubble, in torrents black, the refuse of wreck and  
corruption.

Round sweeps the horrible maelstrom, and into the  
whirl of its vortex  
Circle a broken boat, an oar-blade, things without  
number ;  
Striving, they shove one another, and seem to  
hurry, impatient  
To measure the shadowy will-be, and seek from  
their torment a respite.

Logs that have leapt the Falls and swum unseen  
'neath the current,  
Here are restored again, and weird is their resur-  
rection ;

Here like straws they are snapt, and grinding like  
millstones together,  
Chafing and splintering their mates, they wade in  
their deepening ruins ;  
Till, without hope, on tiptoe they rise, lips shriv-  
eled and speechless,  
Seeing sure fate before them that tightens its toils  
to ensnare them ;  
Hollow the hell-hole gapes, and ravenously it re-  
ceives them, —  
All that is left is a sigh, and the echoes of that are  
soon strangled.

X.

CONCLUSION.

This then, can this be the end ? and death but a  
blotting forever ?  
Turning, a bird was beside me, and striking a deli-  
cate measure,  
Clearly it whistled, — a herald-like strain, that chal-  
lenged a hearer,  
Sung — 't was a broken song, — and stopping, far  
distant it fluttered.

"Seek within!" was its message, "without is only  
reflection;  
Sinless are nature's forms, and therefore utter  
soulless;  
Sin may debase thee, make thee the servant of  
Fate and of Nature, —  
But to thy height arise, and thou art of all things  
creator.

"That alone is august which is gazed upon by the  
noble,  
That alone is gladsome which eyes full of gladness  
discover;  
Night-time is but a name for the darkness man  
nurtures within him,  
Storm but a symbol of sin in a soul that is stained  
and unshriven.

"Act but thine own true part, as He who created  
hath purposed,  
Then are the waters thine, the winds, all forces of  
nature;  
Thine too the seasons, their fruits, which they red-  
den but to surrender,  
Thine too the years, and thine all time, — ever-  
lasting and fearless!"

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## PART SECOND. PEN PICTURES.



## SANDY HOOK.

WHITE sand and cedars ; cedars, sand ;  
Light-houses here and there ; a strand  
Strewn o'er with driftwood ; tangled weeds ;  
A squad of fish-hawks poised above  
The nets, too anxious-eyed to move ;  
Flame-flowering cactus ; wingéd seeds,  
That on a sea of sunshine lie  
Unfanned, save by some butterfly ;  
A sun now reddening toward the west ;—  
And under and through all one hears  
That mellow voice, old as the years,  
The waves' low monotone of unrest.  
So wanes the summer afternoon  
In drowsy stillness, and the moon  
Appears ; when sudden, round about  
The wind-cocks wheel, — hoarse fog-horns shout  
A warning, and in gathering gloom  
Against the sea's white anger loom  
Tall shapes of wreckers, torch in hand,  
Rattling their life-boats down the sand !

MAIN LIGHT, *July*, 1879.

## THE SHEPHERDESS.

A HILL of heather 'gainst a yellow sky ;  
And on its top, as on a buttress high,  
A shape, a moving form, from rock to rock  
With hands uplifted leading home the flock.

As on the living picture wends its way,  
A silhouette upon the fading day,  
The figure stops, and one by one, aright,  
The sheep pass by, and downward, out of sight.

And after them the figure follows down,  
Grows short and shorter, till the heather brown  
Alone is left, and one uplifted hand, —  
Then purple twilight covers up the land.

EDINBURGH, SCOTLAND.

## THE HARPER.

No wonder, harp, thou likest well to lie  
Thus nestled to her bosom ; — so would I !  
No wonder thy soft, rapturous undertone,  
When her flushed cheek creeps nearer to thine  
own !

No wonder her white buskin and lithe thigh  
Thrill thee from head to heel with half-drawn sigh ;  
And that whene'er her hands caress thy breast,  
Thou sendest forth a shudder of unrest !

No wonder that whene'er thou leanest nearer,  
Thou singest ever louder, ever clearer, —  
Now laughing, while a smile lights up her lips,  
Now weeping, while a tear-drop from her slips ;  
And then, from very ecstasy, again  
Breakest to laughter — half delight, half pain,  
Which ripples to each listener and awakes  
That boyhood glee that Time too soon o'ertakes, —  
But then, like all our glee, before it flies  
Strikes on the thorn beneath the rose, and dies.  
No wonder, passionate harp, thou lov'st to lie  
Half buried on her bosom ; — so would I !



## BATTLE OF THE FORD.

[Impression left after listening to story narrated by a French cavalry officer.]

"FAR off the eye could catch the sea aglimmer  
Against the west, — now but a shimmer, —  
And tremulous, with each wink its line grew dim-  
mer ;

"Till now a massed-up blur alone remains,  
Stabbed through by lightning ; pommel and reins  
Blooded with sword-thrusts and long trickling stains.

"Keen was the crackle of the steady thunder,  
Shriller the screaming shot, and under  
My horse's hoofs they tore the world asunder.

"The lightnings keen ! but just above the bridge  
Flamed a live furnace, and the ridge  
Of tents ran fire, even to the river's edge.

"Its current, curdled, dammed the purple tide  
With wrecks ; the torrent, stupefied,  
Shrank from the heroes who down-dropping died.

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*DEAD CEDARS.*

35

"Night was disguised, an unsunned monster day ;  
And daybreak, coming, snatched the gray  
Smoke muffle, and close hid her face away."

TOURS, FRANCE.

*DEAD CEDARS.*

By noonday, stranded skeletons they seem,  
Of behemoths borne from some far, tropic stream,  
In some bright-blossoming period of old ;  
By moonlight, spectres, with long ghostly hands,  
Trenching a magic circle in the sands,  
Lest stumbling footstep fire the night with gold.

## COLUMBUS.

[For title-page of Irving's "Columbus."]

HE failed. He reached to grasp Hesperides,  
To track the footsteps of the sun, that flies  
Toward some far-western couch, and watch it  
rise, —

But fell on unknown sand-reefs, chains, disease.

He won. With splendid daring, from the seas'  
Hard, niggard fist he plucked the prize,  
And gave a virgin world to Europe's eyes,  
Where gold-dust choked the streams, and spice the  
breeze.

He failed fulfillment of the task he planned,  
And dropped a weary head on empty hand,  
Unconscious of the vaster deed he'd done ;  
But royal legacy to Ferdinand  
He left : a key to doorways gilt with sun, —  
And proudest title of "World-father" won !

THE MUMMY AND THE ROSE.

[On picture by F. S. Church, representing a mummy's head  
contrasted with a rose in bloom.]

GRIM contrast! 'Gainst a background weird as  
night,

A mummy's head, with smirking jaws apart,  
And cerements of coarse linen clasping tight  
Its snaky locks, that seem to writhe and dart.

Before it, smiling, flushed with recent flight  
(For Morning wore it near her throbbing heart),  
Each crumpled petal dewy yet, and bright,  
A half-blown rose! — Thy pulses well may start!

Profane, almost, the fancy thus confessed :  
This fragile thing, like gauntlet girt with lace,  
Flung in the withered cheek of Time, — sad jest ;  
And sorrier still, that this lean, lecherous face  
So close to blushing innocence should slip, —  
Dead Past and Maiden Present lip to lip !

## MAID MARIE.

SOFT sunset kissed the castle court,  
And kissed the curtains where she lay ;  
Listless she looked, while white as milk  
Her doves came hovering o'er the bay ;  
On mantel, bench, and bed they sat,  
On cornice-mold and carved stairway,  
And cooing sadly, waited still ;—  
Done was the sweet June day.

Treading their perch with restless feet,  
Sore grieved each feathered carrier grew ;  
Then came the whirl of their countless wings  
(Save one that to her bosom drew),  
While through the lattice and low porch,  
Afar into the heavens blue,  
Where past the clouds a pathway led,  
Bearing her soul they flew.

THE MANOR LORD.

BESIDE the landsman knelt a dame,  
And slowly pushed the pages o'er ;  
Still by the hearthfire's spending flame  
She waited, while a hollow roar  
Came from the chimney, and the breath  
Of twice seven hounds upon the floor ;  
And save the old man's labored moan,  
The night had no sound more.

The fire flickered ; with a start  
The master hound upflung his head ;  
Sudden he whined, when with one spring  
Each hunter bounded from his bed, —  
And through rent blind and bolted door  
All voiceless every creature fled ;  
The blinking watcher closed her book :  
“ Amen, our lord is dead ! ”

## THE THREE POPLARS.

A PICTURE FROM NORMANDY.

THREE of them — lithe Lombard poplars —  
Stand half wading in the brook,  
And stoop to hold it like a mirror,  
O'er which they lean and look.

Lonely, maybe — not unlikely !  
Level is that Norman reach ;  
Full three good leagues it westward stretches,  
Then dips into sand-beach.

Far to southward, far to northward,  
Shine the grain-fields, gold and green,  
That pant beneath the summer noonday ;  
The Vire road shines between.

Poppies, red like living embers,  
Burn among the ripened wheat ;  
And butterflies, above the corn-flowers,  
Like sparks fly, vivid, fleet.

Far to eastward, the horizon  
Lifts into a ridge of blue —  
There lie the hills, and just below them  
A minster looms up too.

Now the noon, with poppies drunken,  
Down its heavy head hath laid ;  
Barley reapers, prone, are napping  
Beneath their sheaves new-made.

And the three trees, dozing, dreaming,  
Taste again Italian skies,  
Flooding the land so full of sunlight  
That every shadow dies.

Suddenly there comes a whisper  
That the sea, portentous, sends ;  
The stillness all at once grows solemn —  
A hush of death descends.

Dim upon the far horizon,  
Lo, the wheat-fields shimmer white ;  
They lift and drop, they flash and darken,  
Like billowy seas of light.

Vineyards sway, and bean and hop-fields  
Kneel before some unseen power ;



A horseman, posting down the highway,  
Builds up a dusty tower.

Swift, across the meadows sweeping,  
Nears the tide and neareth still ;  
It smites the brook, and breaks its mirror, —  
It is the wind's fierce will !

Just behind, rain chariots follow,  
Heavy-wheeled they rush and roll,  
Approaching ever nearer, nearer, —  
Fear lends the trees a soul.

Wheat, down-thrown, is trampled under  
As though smitten by a flail ;  
And wild, with slim white arms embracing,  
The poplars turn death-pale.

## THE DREAM OF THE STORK.

[While visiting Strasbourg I occupied a sky-parlor in a hotel, where my nearest neighbor was a stork, domiciled on one of the chimneys of the opposite house. During the day it occasionally dropped into the streets and court-yards, but with the coming of twilight it could always be seen outlined against the western sky, — a spectral shape, poised with one leg upon the house-top, and with head depressed, as if wrapt in contemplation. The dream of this weird bird, as nearly as I could make it out, was something as follows.]

“WARDER of Zimmerman’s house” the goodfolk  
of Strasbourg have clept me.  
Eldest of all their storks, I restfully drowse on my  
roof-tree,  
Folded about by twilight, with all the heavens en-  
shrouded,  
Save to the uttermost west, where a luminous rib-  
bon still lingers.  
And as I drowse and dream, the dusky present for-  
getting,

Lo! the gates of the past swing open on whispering  
hinges,  
While, like a wrack of wind-scud, swift on the heels  
of each other  
Flying out of the gloom, across the low, lurid horizon,  
Struggle in weird procession the ghosts of my former  
companions!

Memnon of Thebes I see, saluting the daydawn  
with music,  
Calling with magic voice to Ra, far-throned on the  
mountains,  
Saying: "Arise, All-father! Behold how parched  
are our pastures!  
Thrill with thy passionate kiss the proud Abyssinian  
snow-tops!  
Quicken with wonder of life the wombs of the  
fountains, long barren,  
Breathe on the shrunken breasts of the cataracts,  
—breathe, and restore them!  
Ra, have pity upon us, and seeing our grief and  
repentance,  
Lift to our thirsting lips the bowl of thine infinite  
bounty!"

Laughter of waves I hear, as Memnon's prayer  
being ended,  
Caught by a thousand tongues the echoing answer  
returneth ;  
Plash of the fish I hear, as the tide grows clearer  
and colder !  
Winnow of flickering wings, the rustle of reed and  
of bulrush,  
Breezes stirring the palms, the behemoth plunging  
and trampling,  
Ripple of rising waves and gossip of murmuring  
voices  
Whispering each to the other, " Is not the Ibis be-  
hindhand ?  
All things else being ready, wherefore comes not  
the Ibis ? "  
Then as they speak he comes, the herald of bloom  
and of harvest,  
White as the lilies that fringe the banks of the fast-  
swelling river ;  
Sailing with princely air, among the lotus he set-  
tles,  
Pushing aside the lilies ; and now with one shout  
of laughter,  
Leap with a joyous bound the plumèd and gallop-  
ing billows

Over the shrinking dykes ; and wide through the  
meadows unclouded  
Runs the rich bounty of Zefa, and long-rainless  
meadows are watered.

Cheops I see, and Cephrenes, their shoulders  
crimsoned with sun-burst,  
Drifts from a by-gone age left beached on the sand-  
driven present,  
Looming serene, unaltered, above the surge of the  
ages.  
Needle-like shafts I see, writ o'er by Time's finger  
untiring,  
Signs from that halcyon age whereby my soul was  
once nurtured,  
Which, having served its time, to newer forms was  
transmitted,  
Nobler or grosser, happy or hard, as Ra in his  
wisdom  
Found for the ultimate good, that the world might  
work its redemption.

Smilest thou in thy dreams ? May thy sleep, my  
brother, be restful !  
'Neath these bird feathers of mine, like thee a spirit  
I cherish,

Kindled by Helios' torch, that hath neither end nor  
beginning,  
Being a part of that presence, the same All-father,  
All-mother, —  
Being a part of the God that hath neither end nor  
beginning.  
Lo ! my spirit, like thine, once lodged in a man-  
child's bosom,  
Slowly grew with his growth, was filled with hunger  
and yearning,  
Stricken by human sorrow, striving, oft foiled and  
oft fretted ;  
Till to full manhood I grew, a bearded and priestly  
Egyptian,  
Who, 'tween the pilons of Thebes, the brazen sis-  
trum resounding,  
Or through its populous courtways bearing my  
scrolls of papyrus,  
Walked and was voiceless as now, perceiving all  
things, but in silence.

Trust it not to thy tongue, but this is my day-  
dream mysterious.  
Hence seek I lofty sites, that offer the broadest  
horizons ;

Hence do I sit in stillness, pursuing the old meditations,  
Loving the warmth of thy chimney that tells of a home and a fireside,  
Loving thy bells, thy streets, the rumble of traffic and fashion ;  
Yet ever lonely, estranged, and longing to doff these disguises,  
Summon my human voice, for ages tongue-tied and silent,  
And in my panther robe, slow-paced, fork-bearded, and kindly,  
Drop to thy latticed porch,— and drawing thy children about me,  
Cull from my curious lore replies to their questions untiring.  
Hence, with the waning sun and the earliest challenge of winter,  
Longing I southward look and restlessly rustle my pinions,  
Drawn toward my haunts of old, though fireless long, and forsaken,  
Drawn toward familiar skies and toward the tombs of my fathers,  
Where, in the starless depths of a nether and honeycombed city,

Sealed in its painted cradle and wrapt in its herbs  
and fine linen,  
Lies, long tenantless, cold, the cage that once prisoned  
my spirit.

Hence, with the morrow morn, ere the minster  
bells have awakened,  
Leagues away will I be, perceiving upon the horizon,  
Dimly, the film of blue that tells of the Mediterranean ;  
And when thy babes from their nests slip forth to  
the wind-shaken casement,  
Barren my nest will be, and sadly through slumbering  
Strasbourg  
Lip unto lip will reëcho the tidings of deep lamentation :  
“Lo ! the storks have flown southward ! Empty  
their nests on our roof-trees !  
Bitter the air hath grown ; our summer hath with  
them flown southward !  
Lo ! the north is obscured, and Winter, unstalling  
his legions,  
Wreath'd by his stallions' breath and smoke of his  
axle-trees flaming,  
Leaps to their front, scythe-charioted, and rides to  
besiege us.”



Lock then thy casements, and feed fresh logs to  
thy hungering chimneys ;  
Now is love's harvest to homes where closer the  
hearts cling together.  
Live then from day to day remembering that I,  
who forget not,  
Wearing beneath my wings reward both for good  
and for evil,  
Will, if thy scroll be stainless, flutter again to thy  
roof-tree,  
Bringing, at each return, from hand of Hathor the  
Golden,  
Meed beyond earthly price, the gifts of love and  
contentment !

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PART THIRD.  
SONGS AND BALLADS.



## THE TZIGANS' POT.

### I.

I AM the Tzigans' pot ;  
I have come from a far-away no-man's-land,  
Hung heavy in many a swarthy hand,  
The homeless mate of a hearthless race,  
Who, as they wander from place to place,  
Still cling to their Tzigans' pot.

### II.

I am the Tzigans' pot ;  
When daylight fades into dusk and damp,  
I help the womenfolk cheer the camp  
With my brushwood fire, whose friendly glow  
Soon brightens the boughs and the faces below  
That circle the bubbling pot.

### III.

I am the Tzigans' pot ;  
That many a boisterous noon hath known,  
When bitter the sleety blasts have blown,

.

When frosty feet have crept close to mine,  
And children's voices, chilled to a whine,  
Have blest the warm Tzigans' pot.

## IV.

I am a Tzigans' pot,  
And dreary daybreaks remember too,  
When mouths were many and leeks were few ;  
But never, while I 'd a gourdful still,  
Was any who hungered refused his fill  
By the rover, the Tzigans' pot.

## LONGING.

I HEAR in the twitter of birds her song,  
I hear her step in the rustling grass,  
Her laugh on the evening breeze, — and I long  
To see my Margaret pass.

I see her eyes in the sparkling dew,  
Her hair in the tasseled corn, soft fanned,  
Her form in the drifting cloud, — and I long  
To hold my Margaret's hand.

I feel her pulse in the river's flow,  
In the summer rain, that drips and drips,  
Her breath on the perfumed breeze, — and I long  
To taste my Margaret's lips !

## YESTERDAY.

WHILE King Karl at midnight feasted,  
Sudden, springing from his chair,  
With clenched hand he smote his forehead,  
Wailing, "Lost ! beyond repair !"

"Nay, my lord," his courtiers answered,  
"Do but name your royal will,  
Serried spears and flashing banners  
Shall command the Meuse stand still !"

"Nay again !" the pale king stammered,  
While still clanged the cloister bell,  
'Lost, beyond all snares most cunning !  
Hear'st thou not its good-bye knell ?

"All my bow-men and my stallions,  
All my fleet of beakéd ships,  
Powerless are to fetch or find it  
When, as now, the treasure slips ;

“ All the marble in my quarries,  
All my barley, sack on sack,  
All my crowns of crusted jewels  
Cannot buy the bounty back ! ”



## WYNHILDA.

## I.

“THOU shalt not whimper, daughter mine !  
No selfish season this for sighs !  
There are kine to milk, and paths to be digged,  
And the hind — hear how it grieves and cries !  
Fresh snow on the roof-tree lieth thick,  
Still heavy the drifts weigh down the skies ;  
This be a day to do and dare, —  
Then up, Wynhilda, — dry thine eyes ! ”

## II.

“It ’s not from the handwork I hold back,  
It ’s not for frost I fret and weep ;  
My fingers are willing, — but faith grows faint, —  
O prithee, mother, let me sleep ! ”

## III.

“Weak words, thy words, Wynhilda mine !  
These days, bear-fierce, must hearts be dead ;  
Though Edwald sleep face-down to-night,  
And firebrand show his bosom red

With axe and war-bill, vain be tears !  
This morn 's no morn to hang the head ;  
Our clansmen's woe is our common woe, —  
And death were his proudest marriage-bed ! ”

## IV.

“ Nay, stay thy chiding, mother mine !  
I 've flown this night to the field, rock-girt ;  
I weep, but not for Edwald slain, —  
A caitiff he skulked, alone unhurt ! ”

## ANNIVERSARY HYMN.

THERE have been nobler days, my friends,  
And ruddier skies than ours,  
When men wrought deeds, but God the ends,  
And faiths grew into powers.

There have been loftier stations too,  
When youths wore souls of men,  
Because they had great deeds to do, —  
Greatness was goodness then.

And prouder destinies have been,  
When truth was saved from harm,  
Smitten, the miracles of sin  
By man's God-muscle arm.

Yet epochs, stations, destinies  
Are not mere births of time ;  
Sublimely do what in us lies :  
This is to be sublime !

## SCARRED.

FAR nobler the sword that is nicked and worn,  
Far fairer the flag that is grimy and torn,  
Than when, to the battle, fresh they were borne.

He was tried and found true ; he stood the test ;  
'Neath whirlwinds of doubt, when all the rest  
Crouched down and submitted, he fought best.

There are wounds on his breast that can never be  
    healed,  
There are gashes that bleed, and may not be sealed,  
But wounded and gashed, he won the field.

And others may dream in their easy-chairs,  
And point their white hands to the scars he bears,  
But the palm and the laurel are his — not theirs !

## DAISIES.

BEAUTIFUL daisies !

Sitting and smiling along the rough ledges,  
And under the frown of the hawthorn hedges.

Beautiful daisies !

Asking no favor except for room,  
A bit of a foot-hold, to be and to bloom.

Beautiful daisies !

Swinging a censer whose breaths arise,  
A pure adoration up to the skies.

Beautiful daisies !

Seeking no praises, but living to bloom,  
And gladden the breezes with sweet perfume.

THE NEST IN THE HAW.

I.

A HAW, with branches of bloom ;  
And a bird on the topmost,  
Sitting and swinging,  
And merrily singing, —  
O'er all the sunshiny meadow  
Her glad music flinging.

II.

A brook is under the haw,  
With pads and white blossoms ;  
And eddying, curling,  
It gives them a twirling,  
And half drowns the tender white lilies  
With foaming and whirling.

III.

But out of the brook there slides  
A serpent gold-crested ;  
Star-bright are his eyes,  
But his lips are lies, —  
He spoils the nest of the redbreast,  
And wounded she flies.

## GOOD-MORROW!

SUNBEAMS, laughing, kiss the windows,  
Murmuring, "Open, little eyes !  
The fields are filled with flowers and birds,  
The sky with butterflies !"

Rain-drops patter on the windows,  
Saying, "Sleep a little more ;  
The flowers are wet, the birds are hid,  
And rain beats on the door."

Snow-flakes light upon the windows,  
Flying slow and silently,  
Just lisping, "Hush ! don't waken them  
Till we have heaped up high."

Hailstones rattle on the windows,  
Crying, "Keep the children in !  
For Day and Darkness are at war ;  
Wait until Day shall win !"

Apple-blossoms on the windows  
With their dainty fingers tap :  
“ Now all who love the world, awake !  
The world wakes from its nap.”



## THE RED RIDER.

THEY fetched the fierce pretender  
A captive to King Thorald's hall,  
And king and all his courtier train  
Were merrymaking at his fall.

"How now, ye spurred Red Rider!  
Where now thine iron-pointed pen,  
That wrote such royal promises  
To tempt my swords and serving men!

"Write now thy name, Red Rider,  
Upon the face of this fair wall,  
That these my guests may drink thy health,  
Whene'er they gather in my hall."

Then straightway to the dais  
The knight approached with kingly stride,  
And from its scabbard snatched the blade  
That sparkled by King Thorald's side.

None stirred; death-still the chamber;  
Till leapt a shriek from every part,

As to the hilt the stranger thrust  
The dagger, nigh his own hot heart.

And smearing then his finger  
From off the dripping, gory thing,  
He scrawled across the marble wall  
These words of scarlet : " Eckhart, King."

'T was written, and close wrapping  
His soldier's cloak about his face,  
He tottered to his brother's throne, —  
Then fell — and fear fell on the place.

And prone were all the people,  
While shrill the queen and jester cried ; —  
For claimant-king, king-claimant, both,  
That fatal festal night had died.

## SONG : THE CARPENTER.

## I.

I 'm sad, I 'm sad, for the joy I had  
Is wrecked like a craft in mid-sea ;  
It 's strange, but suddenly youth's fond hope  
Seems lost forever to me.

Oho ! how slow the shavings go ;  
But let me do what I can, —  
For man, for man was meant for labor,  
And labor was meant for man.

## II.

I 'm glad, I 'm glad, for the grief I had  
Has blown like a cloud away ;  
My heart, my plane, let us laugh together,  
For night has bloomed into day.

Hi, hi ! how spry the shavings fly !  
I 'll work as well as I can, —  
For man, for man was meant for labor,  
And labor was meant for man.

III.

O, weary the hour that ushers toil,  
And heavy the moan of the plane,  
When labor is not the labor of love,  
And can be never again.

Oho ! how slow the shavings go ;  
But let us do what we can, —  
For man, for man was meant for labor,  
And labor was meant for man.

IV.

But light is endeavor that hath a heart ;  
O, sweet those sunshiny days,  
When every bird-call carols of hope,  
And joy speaks a thousand ways.

Hi, hi ! how spry the shavings fly !  
I 'll work as well as I can, —  
For man, for man was meant for labor,  
And labor was meant for man.

## THE HANDSEL RING.

[Introductory song to second edition of "The Legend of St. Olaf's Kirk."]

"Here, O lily-white lady mine,  
Here by thy warrior sire's own shrine,  
Handsel I thee by this golden sign,  
    This sunshiny thing."  
Weeping she reached her hand so slim,  
Smiled, though her eyes were wet and dim,  
Saying: "I swear, by Heaven, by him,  
    And by this handsel ring!"

But as she bended her eyes abashed,  
Out of his fingers the jewel flashed,  
On the gray flags of the kirk it clashed,  
    That treacherous thing;  
Clashed, and bounded, and circled, and sped,  
Till through a crevice it flamed and fled, —  
Down in the tomb of the knightly dead  
    Darted the handsel ring.

"Matters not, darling ! Ere day be o'er,  
Goldsmiths shall forge for thy hands a score ;  
Let not thy heart be harried and sore  
For a little thing !"

"Nay ! but behold what broodeth there !  
See the cold sheen of his silvery hair !  
Look how his eyeballs roll and stare,  
Seeking thy handsel ring !"

"I see nothing, my precious, my own !  
'T is a black vision that sorrow hath sown ;  
Haste, let us hence, for dark it hath grown,  
And moths are on wing."

"Nay, but his shrunken fist, behold,  
Looses his lance-hilt and scatters the mold !  
What is that his long fingers hold ?  
Christ ! 't is our handsel ring !"

And when the bridegroom bends over her,  
Neither the lips nor the eyelids stir ;  
Naught to her, now, but music and myrrh, —  
Needless his handsel ring.



PART FOURTH.

DRIFT FROM YORK-HARBOR,  
MAINE.





## ALONGSHORE.

ON Maine's rough coast-line, where its rocky front  
Frowns most forbiddingly, with sudden break  
A small, blue river pours into the sea,  
And widening forms a harbor, pent but safe ;  
Behind which, half concealed by buttonwoods,  
The church-spire of Old-York lifts to the winds  
Its weather-cock.

Below this spire, a town,  
Where, truant from the city dials, come  
The lazy hours to lose themselves in dreams  
And sweet forgetfulness of summer heat ;  
An idle sort of place, where all day long  
It seems like evening with the day's work done,  
Where men haste not, because there is no haste,  
And toil but little, for they 've little need ;  
A restful corner, where the August breeze,  
From softly listening, finger on the lip,  
At length from listlessness falls fast asleep,  
Till there is no sound heard save, now and then,  
Low thunder of a wagon on the bridge,

Mary Mellish  
Archibald  
Memorial

Some shrill cicada from his citadel  
Beneath a thistle, challenging the noon,  
The whet of scythe and heavy hoist of sail,  
The dip of unseen oars, monotonous,  
And softly breathing waves that doze below,  
Too weak to more than turn themselves, complain,  
And doze again.

Here I 've a summer love  
To loiter, these small noises in my ears,  
And with far-looking eyes to drink the blue  
Of the near mountain, and turn back the leaves  
Of legends and dim-lettered histories  
From older days, when York was still a maid,  
And wore her virgin name. Sweet word it was ;  
The red-man gave it her, — his chieftain's name,  
Whom first the crooning west wind had baptized,  
And still all nature knows her by that name,  
Melodious with the murmur of sea waves  
And waving boughs, — for often in the night  
I 've heard the lonesome winds and hemlock-trees  
Calling together : " Ag-a-men-ti-cus ! "  
While the round mountain, where the legends say  
Still sleeps the chieftain, glowed with changing  
lights,  
As if the ghosts of long-departed tribes

Waved torches o'er their sachem's sacred dust.  
I love to stray along the straggling town,  
To peer into its cottages, low church,  
And jail long tenantless ; and lift the latch  
That now alone suffices to defend  
The block-house, once the town's frail lease of  
                  hope  
In days of discord. Following then the road,  
I wander beachward past the fishers' huts,  
With figure-head or horse-shoe on each door,  
Where men mend sails, and files of garrulous geese  
Discuss the turn of tides or weather signs,  
And solemnly file on.

                                  Here, from this knoll,  
The stretch of the blue ocean breaks in view,  
Flecked only by white sails, a tiny spire  
White like a sail, but still, — Boone Island Light ;  
And southward, like shy clouds that may dissolve,  
The Isles of Shoals, far glimmering.

  Now the road,  
With weakening steps, forgets to further stray,  
And slumbers by the quiet of the route,  
Leaving the outer world a wilderness, —  
Forgets, or was it memory of the deed

Once done here, that with milkweed choked the  
way?

Blanching the lips of the adventurer,  
Who cried : " Here and no further will I fare ! "   
Look down, and on the bed-rock you will see  
Dull streaks of crimson lichens ; on this spot —  
'T was long ago, but still the tale is new,  
For blood-spots never lose their horror — dropt  
York's first pale minister, a goodly man,  
Whom ill a town could spare at any time,  
Still less in those dark days. Here with one sigh  
He died, a hatchet buried in his brain,  
Filled but a moment earlier with sweet thoughts ;  
And here the murderer left his victim stript,  
And glorying in his shame ran to the church,  
Decked in the pastoral garb, and at its door  
Taunted the worshipers, as in twos and threes  
They came by foot or horseback. Lying here,  
No curse was read upon the open lips,  
But in this trickling autograph of blood  
The town-folk, outraged, traced the red-man's  
doom.

A half mile further on, by slender path  
That twists and turns among a stunted growth  
Of teasels and snarl-rooted junipers,

Striving to hide the leanness of the land,  
We toil at length by an ascending grade  
To greener heights, where mid the lichened rocks,  
And dimples of the down by thistles hedged,  
The sheep find pasturage. Here on a knoll  
That southward slopes, close walled about by elms  
And chestnuts, warding off the winter winds,  
A farmstead nestles, with its clustering group  
Of barns, snug sheep-cotes, and wide, fertile fields  
Of ripening grain.

I love this old, red house,  
Where many a summer night I've lain at ease  
Behind that upper window looking east,  
And many a midnight willed to ward off sleep,  
Preferring the sweet melody of the waves,  
More restful. Naked is the building's face  
With not a vine upon it, but hard by  
Stand lilac bushes, where the birds weave nests,  
And from them carol when the day is new,  
Saying, "Good-morrow!" — then a tall, drest elm,  
That guards the grindstone's place and helps to sift  
The glare and fervor from the midday sun,  
When from the meadow comes the glistening scythe  
To cool its brilliance with a watery edge,  
And tease the ear of the o'erheated day

With its keen rasp, far sounding. Here too stands  
The well-sweep, leaning to look down and greet,  
Within the hollow depth, a nether world  
And nether well-sweep.

Just behind the house  
Hides an old orchard, where the pear-trees drop  
Delicious windfalls ; many an early morn  
I've hastened there to find them, pushed apart  
The rank grass pearled with dew-drops, and peered  
down  
To catch their yellowing glimmer. There too smiles  
A garden, fragrant with sweet-smelling herbs,  
Where savory camomile and southernwood  
Weave spells that bring the blush of childhood  
back ;  
Where bloom bright four-o'clocks and bouncing-  
bets,  
With hollyhocks upon whose pink-white breasts  
The bees cling pendant, drunk with over-feast ;  
Where dying peonies, wading ankle-deep  
In their own life-blood, totter to their doom ;  
And fiery sunflowers lord it over all,  
Staring a gorgeous stare.

Further behind  
Stand rocks precipitous, where last at night

The sunshine lingers, but no herbage finds,  
For winds, those gypsy campers, trample it,  
Stealing the very sand ; while high o'er all  
Looms a dumb-beacon, landmark miles around,  
And when the night-winds, hid among the trees,  
Hold their tribunals and bewail their woes,  
It groans " Amen ! " in mournful unison.  
Here, when red sundowns set the west aflame,  
The view is glorious. Far off to the north  
The jealous land, with every wane of tide,  
Sends out into the surf a long, slim arm,  
And rolls and measures in its hollow hand  
A rocky isle, — the Nubble, it is called, —  
Glad landfall unto many a hungry eye,  
That in those early days, before a sail  
E'er whitened York's small harbor, strained to catch  
Some token of the new, half-doubted world.  
Next, circling like a sickle, toward us bends  
A yellow beach, the Long Sands ; then, black rocks,  
Among which, like the gloomy lurking-place  
Of some sea creature, darkens a huge cave,  
In whose recesses, when the tide-waves flux,  
A hollow murmur echoes, heard far off,  
With sighs and breathings, strange, unspeakable,  
That deepen as the night-hush settles down, —  
A swashing, as of some unwholesome beast



Turning its clumsy shape from side to side, —  
A crushing, as of monster jaws that craunch  
The ribs of mammals.

Nearer still, more rocks,  
Piled orderless, among which stand exposed  
The remnants of a vessel that the sea,  
To prove the valor of its strong right hand,  
Once tossed and wedged there. 'T was a furious  
night !

I slept in my saug chamber ; waked, and heard  
The rain upon my window, dashed in sheets,  
With blasts that shook the roof-tree, and huge seas  
That seemed to rock the very hill itself  
Under the house. I felt a growing dread ;  
Then heard the men-folk stirring, and leapt up  
To seek companionship. We heaped the hearth  
With logs (though 't was not winter), gathering  
near,

And telling tales of nights like unto this,  
And what dread sights they sometimes left to shock  
The waking daybreak, — tales of fate and woe, —  
Of fishing-smacks blown from far-distant ports,  
That meeting in the darkness kissed and sank ;  
Of snow-winged ships that smiting on the reef  
Clinked mast and spar as brittle stems of ice,

And like a frost-scene melted in the sun,  
Of funneled frigates, all their bravery shorn,  
Drifting unruddered over rainy seas ;  
Of two-score monsters in one long-boat crammed,  
With fevered lips still telling the red suns,  
And feeding on their decrease, till but one,  
With wolfish eyes, remained to tell of it ;  
And of a spectre bark with sails full set  
Which swept before an autumn equinox,  
Presaging that dull day when every house  
Was filled with lamentation.

Talking thus,  
Of this, and that, and all things harrowing,  
And closing, with each finish of a tale,  
The circuit of our belt about the hearth,  
Sudden, — while every eye was round and fixed  
Upon the speaker, — sudden at the blind  
Came knockings, — and we started to our feet,  
Clutching each other, till the unlatched door  
Gaped open, and three haggard, wild-eyed men  
In staggered, begging in the name of Christ :  
“ A draught of liquor, brothers, and a bed !  
For we be dying ! ” Thereupon the first,  
Falling across the threshold, choked the way ;  
And they who to the doorposts feebly clung,

Like spectres eyed us. From that wreck they  
came, —  
All that the waves had spared, — and when day  
dawned  
The shore with their companions was far strewn.

Thus to the stranger, loitering from the town  
Or rowing roundabout, looks Norwood Farm.  
So looks the nook in which I love to hide,  
Forgetful of life's dull routine of cares,  
Forgetful that life other duty holds  
Than to lie down in the cool shade of trees,  
To drink the air and light, as flowers do,  
And rest completely. Here with half-shut eyes  
I've dreamt light day-dreams, letting fancy fly  
Whither it would, so it flew not too far,  
To make return wing-weary. Some I've held  
As keepsakes, that they might revive again  
The pictured dreams ; but as I read them now,  
I find, like pebbles picked at break of day  
From shining beaches, most have lost their charm  
With their lost sunglow.

Such from Norwood's Knoll  
The scenes on which its beacon daily frowns ;  
And all about, on every side save one —

The narrow neck that links it with the world —  
A tide of sunshine breaks with waves of warmth  
On piebald hill-slopes sprinkled with ripe crops,  
Tossing the billowy fields of aftermath,  
And wreathes with trophies of the vine and oak  
This titan form, o'er which the summer flings  
A leopard's hide, that from its shoulder trails  
Down-sweeping to the carpet of the sea, —  
A sea white-capped, like ermine-mantled throne,  
On which this bold peninsula sits — king !

## THE GATEWAY.

## A VACATION EPISODE.

WE crossed the pasture-land together,  
I knew that now my time drew near,  
And hastened, longing for the moment,  
Yet lingering, holding back in fear.

I wished the sunshine would not flicker  
Across the river in my eyes ;  
Then hers she shaded with her bonnet —  
How could I talk through that disguise !

I wished the catbird would not whistle,  
I paused till he grew tired and still ;  
And then the frogs took up the music,  
And lambs came bleating from the hill.

Now all was silent ; in the stubble  
The crickets even held their peace ;  
But yet I waited, wishing only  
That all the crickets would not cease.

I saw the gateway as we neared it,  
I shaped my mouth and formed the word,  
When from her bonnet, bent demurely,  
A little laugh I thought I heard.

A ploughboy passing, smiled and nodded,  
I bit my lip and blushed for shame ;  
Then stooped to pick a blood-red berry, —  
'T was sour, and speechless I became.

I leaned upon the bars ; she fluttered  
A farewell signal back to me ;  
I turned, I staggered from the roadway, —  
Gray fog came drifting from the sea.

## THE SEA-SHORE.

To sit on the sand and read fine tales,  
To follow the slant of the whitened sails,  
And the clouds, to the south of the harbor's mouth,  
That shift and drift like a shoal of whales.

To watch the waves as they kiss the land,  
To catch their foam in one's hollow hand,  
To hold it and feel the cool drops steal  
Through all one's being as through dry sand.

To laugh with the boys who know nothing of  
care,  
To drift with their skiffs, nobody knows where,  
Till, drunken with day-dreams, life's mystery seems  
Dissolved in the wine of the slumberous air.

The breeze is soft as the breath of a fan,  
But it faints on cheeks that are thin and wan, —  
Too thin for the heart's rill ever to fill,  
Too pale for the sunshine ever to tan.

Land, ocean, and air — the sun declines,  
And twilight, with soft pink fingers, twines  
A woof of the three, till one can scarce see  
The bound 'tween things earthly and things  
divine.

Ye fairy ships, and ye ships of air,  
That trail with my thoughts beyond life's  
care, —  
With canvas like milk, and sheets of silk,  
Stoop down, and I 'll sail with thee anywhere !



## THE REAPER.

THE wheat-stalks are heavy and white,  
They slant beside the wall,  
And lean against each other,  
Lest they should faint and fall.

Beneath them the poppies crouch,  
Knee-deep in their crimson bloom,  
And partridge and shuffling woodchuck  
Glide shyly into the gloom.

Among them the brown bee strays,  
Oft stops to feed his fill,  
And bears his burden of sweetness  
Homeward over the hill.

And over them, to and fro,  
The yellow butterfly wheels,  
Then, catching a flash of sunshine,  
Wafts it across the fields.

The reaper leans on his scythe,  
And watches the river flow,

He watches a boat on its bosom,  
And the rowers as they row.

His hopes are part of its freight,  
And, gazing with misty eyes,  
A tempest of sudden ruin  
Drives through the darkened skies.

For the reaping time has come,  
And waiting the reaper stands,  
But the running river snatches  
The harvest from his hands.

## FOUR-LEAF CLOVER.

"If one find a four-leaf clover"

(She said, sitting on the grass),

"He can wish whate'er he likes to, —  
And that wish shall come to pass."

"Do you say so?" Then down kneeling  
'Mong the sorrel and cropt grass,  
Looked I for a four-leaf clover  
And my wish to come to pass.

Long I searched among the sorrel,  
Close beside me she searched too ;  
Now and then some commonplaces  
Broke the silence, — but it grew.

For my heart was full of yearning,  
And my mouth of eager words,  
But I dared not give them utterance, —  
So I hearkened to the birds ;

And kept looking, looking, looking,  
While beside me she looked too, —

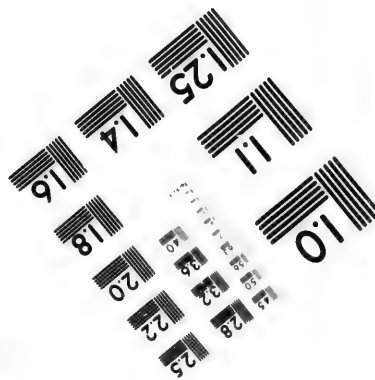
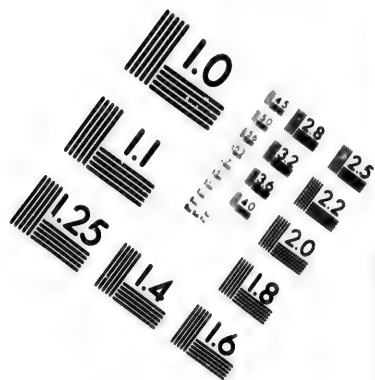
Two bent figures in the twilight,  
Green hills paling into blue.

"Ha! I have one!" "Yes, and wished for?" —

"You! and shall it be?" I cried.

Eyes cast down, she asked demurely,

"Hath the clover not replied?"



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## THE BIG BELL.

A BEACON overlooked the shore ;  
Within a big bell hung ;  
And three stout men stood at the rope  
Whenever it was swung.

In storms and tumults it was heard,  
Loud crying through the gloom,  
Or at the menace of strange craft,  
And fear was in its boom.

It chanced, one day, that to the wharf  
Came Esther, Joseph's wife,  
And on the wet sand played her boy,  
The pearl of Esther's life.

He chased the ripples up and down,  
He stoned the swooping birds,  
And called upon the tall gray cliff  
And made it speak his words.

"Mamma ! mamma !" The woman turned,  
He was not on the beach, —

Green breakers snatched and hurried him  
Far out beyond her reach.

She saw his curls ; one sob to heaven  
The piteous mother sent ;  
Then struggling up the stony chasm,  
Her breathing well-nigh spent,

She sprang within the tower door,  
She seized the hempen coil,  
And at the dozen shivering peals  
Each laborer left his toil.

“O woe is me ! O grievous woe !”  
The booming message rang,  
“Oh ! hasten, yeoman ! Woe is me !”  
It cried, — “Clang-clang, clang-clang !”

They placed the boy safe in her arms,  
And still the big bell hummed ;  
And Joseph bore them to his home,  
Before the bell was dumb.

The tower still stands beside the sea ;  
Within, the bell is hung ;  
But never yet hath man been known  
Who waked its mighty tongue.



## THE SUMMER STORM.

IN a scurry of clouds  
Sudden day fell,  
What ho ! ye swallows !  
All is not well.

With broken flights  
They wheel through the sky,  
And sea-gulls, wailing,  
Go hurrying by.

Up to the bars  
The cattle fare,  
And cries from the sheep-cote  
Fill all the air.

O'er the frightened sea  
The storm-cloud leaps,  
And its shadow behind  
Like a garment sweeps.

The slant rain beats  
The sea into froth,

The hoarse winds have left  
Their home in the north.

High over the beach  
Blows white foam-sleet,  
On gray rock-walls  
The green tides beat.

The reef is drowned,  
Boone Light is wiped out ;  
“ It comes ! it comes ! ”  
The women-folk shout.

Now all is blotted,  
The world is no more, —  
But water, and wind,  
And the sea's uproar.

## EVENING.

A LEVEL sea,  
A film of blue  
Covering the coast-line ;  
A sail or two ;

A ship asleep  
On the offing's breast,  
A blood-red ball  
Low down in the west ;

A poplar perched  
High on the hill,  
Black 'gainst the crimson,  
Stark and still.

Now fades the great ball, —  
It was the sun, —  
And sky and ocean  
Melt into one.

*EVENING.*

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Now the mists, like a tide,  
Slowly lift and lift,  
Till all the landscape  
Is set adrift.

## THE BLACK BOARS.

## I.

THE Black Boars crouch, a huddling pile,  
Without York-Harbor half a mile ;  
And there, at ebbing of the tides,  
They wallow, sunning their shaggy sides,  
And pant and grumble all the while.

About them the flat sea is broke,  
And fleecy foam-clouds, white like smoke,  
Lift heavenward and then landward drift  
Athwart the meadow, where they sift  
Soft rain o'er the driver and his yoke. .

"Wh-hoish ! my beauties ! " Martin said,  
"Cheer up, my bonny one ; courage, Ned !  
Another hour is all I ask,  
But we must haste to end our task, --  
For the Boars bode storm ere day be dead."

Far down the river, beyond the bridge,  
Ruth caught their grunting, but a ridge

Of yellow sand-dunes hid the view ;  
Blue sky she saw, and sunshine, too,  
That laughed on her flowering window-ledge.

Work-weary she arose, pushed back  
Her girlish ringlets thick and black,  
And peering 'neath one shading hand,  
Perceived upon the river sand  
Her Elsie's barrow and small track.

The tall clock told that it grew late ;  
Once more she twirled her wheel of fate ;  
The soft wool stretched and brake in two,  
The kitten caught it as it flew, —  
And chiding her, Ruth sought the gate.

The sea lay motionless ; afar  
White smacks were tacking toward the bar ;  
Adown the hill filed home-bound herds ;  
She watched a few fast-flying birds,  
And following, missed the evening star.

With sudden creak of the weather-vane,  
Wind-scuds, with gray squalls in their train,  
Came flocking from the misty south,  
Throwing a gloom o'er the harbor mouth, —  
A half-felt fear throbbed through her brain.

The river was still a line of light,  
Unflecked save by one dory's flight,  
That toward the darkened offing sped ;  
"Thank God !" the mother fondly said,  
"It's none of mine helms that boat to-night !"

For suddenly it seemed to her  
As if the Black Boars nearer were ;  
A sound of laughter wandered by,  
And echoed back a low, sad cry,  
That sighed in the poplars, now astir.

## II.

Now Martin from the meadow strode,  
His oxen bent 'neath their clover load ;  
Big rain-drops pattered on the barn,  
From the spinning-wheel trailed tangled  
yarn, —  
He called, then sauntered to the road.

Down dropped night's curtains ; hand in hand  
Roamed floods of the air and sea and land ;  
And by the lightning's fitful glows  
Stalked from the sea huge, hooded rows  
Of breakers, thundering up the strand.

III.

Snarled, drifting lily-pads still told  
An ebbing tide, and on it rolled  
    A boat, Ruth tugging at the oars, —  
    Too late she gave ear to the Boars,  
And pierced the treachery they foretold.

Each wind-blast bore the name she cried ;  
The wreckers from the shore descried  
    Her ghostly figure, and were afraid,  
    For to each other low they said :  
" The Boar-King claims to-night a bride ! "

The pounding surf now sounds more near ;  
Her straining eyes in the gloom austere  
    Shape flitting pairs of eyeballs bright,  
    And rude, rough hands from left and right  
Her garments plucking, first wake fear.

The swamping boat now rolls, now flies,  
A shuttlecock between sea and skies ;  
    And toppling giddily in air,  
    Below she sees the wild Boars' lair,  
And looks straight into their bloodshot eyes.



## IV.

Gray broke the drizzly dawn, and found  
Full half the sleepless town's-folk bound  
    Along the streaming ocean front,  
    Some wading, some in skiff or punt,  
Searching the sand and the marshes drowned.

Sad was the scene it woke to show :  
Two shattered boats by the Boars crushed low ;  
    The father, stricken, found them there, —  
    Like silkweed shone the tangled hair  
That bound together their breasts of snow.

THE WITCH OF YORK.

UP o'er the hill and broken wall  
There stole a weird form, bent but tall ;  
    And softly through our unlatched door  
    She crept unbidden, and before  
The hearth-fire crouching, gazed upon us all.

All looked, none spake ; the chimney sighed ;  
The cat mewed drearily and tried  
    To go but could not ; close and dim  
    The room became, and ghastly grim  
The ghosts that fell on us and multiplied.

We heard the gusts ride through the pines,  
We heard them twist from the trellised vines  
    The lean-blows ; and the scowling west  
    Sent up a growl of hoarse unrest,  
As of some hungry beast that frets and whines.

Lean spectres seemed to spur the wind,  
Weird doubts and fancies stormed the mind,

And doubt is fear, and what is fear  
But anguish ! — “ Say ! what lurketh near ?  
Shall our to-morrow cruel prove, or kind ? ”

Then from her breast the creature drew  
Her fate-pack ; moodily she blew  
And deftly shuffled black with red ;  
Till Esther gaped and whispering said  
To Robert, “ One would think she thought she  
knew.”

Whereat, the eyes of the woman-witch  
First sparkled, then grew black as pitch ;  
We shivered at her evil look,  
Her ear-rings in the glamour shook,  
And we could see her neck-cords writhe and twitch.

The low clouds huddled overhead  
In black disorder ; on the shed  
We watched the sunshine, charging, beat  
Them back, then struggle and retreat :  
“ Come, woman, come ! ’t will soon be time for  
bed ! ”

She passed the pack ; the maiden broke  
It into three ; then Robert spoke :

"Tell, mother, this my sister's fate."  
The woman only muttered, "Wait!"  
And silent, fanned the embers into smoke.

The dim light lit the topmost card,  
She looked upon it long and hard,  
Then peering through her grisly brow  
Glared upward at the girl — "Now, now,  
Will I unlock my lips ; mind you each card !

"Ace hearts : sole child, and of love's bed ;  
A spade twice next : both parents dead ;  
Black tenners twice in turn — beware !  
Though comely shaped, thy features fair,  
Thy feet in snares I see, webs round thy head.

"No sister thou ! — black seven : no kin ;  
Aha ! queen clover, treacherous then !  
Well may thy pouting mouth turn pale,  
Within a deuce, beneath swollen sail  
Thou fliest from some sorrow or some sin.

"The second deal holds more. Still pain !  
Within a *trés* behold thy stain  
A smoke to blur and blind the skies,  
A fire kindled, that thine eyes  
May quench not though they should dissolve as rain.

“Black still and clover : in a one  
A coffin ; now third deal, and done.  
Hearts six, and dabbled o’er with red :  
Within that space thy wooer dead ;  
Spades seven : to thee are left seven years to run.”

Aghast we stood ; she spake no more,  
But flung the cards across the floor,  
And up the yawning chimney’s throat,  
With wind-rush and one thunder note,  
She swept. — We looked, and saw the buttoned  
door.

We heard the swallows cry and call,  
Then late, the storm’s long looked-for brawl ;  
And louder, shriller than the last,  
Up through the cavernous flue one blast  
Sucked flame and fuel, cat and cards, — and all !

red :  
;  
ears to run."

roat,  
note,  
the buttoned

brawl ;

the blast  
— and all !

PART FIFTH.  
KETILL THE SAGAMAN.



## KETILL THE SAGAMAN.

### INTRODUCTION TO "SIX FLIGHTS OF THE DRAGONS."

*Scene, Nidaros, the Royal City of Norway; Period,  
about 1150 A. D.*

#### I.

#### THE WINTER COURT AT NIDAROS.

LONG were the night-times on that slip of shore,  
Hedged in on one hand by the snow-capped hills,  
And to the westward by the main, upheaved  
And hillocky, that walled them from the world.

Now Magnus, clept the Proper, best of men,  
On shoulders broad bore up the royal red  
In streeted Nidaros, — a peaceful man,  
More proud to be a father than a king;  
And he, content to see his people glad,  
With rubicund, round face — a smiling sun, —  
Made them the more so.



Yet would seasons fall  
When even pampered sloth grew wearisome ;  
When for long time the north-glow's dream of day,  
By snow-wrack fenced and ever thickening fog,  
Left heaven free race-course for the hurricane ,  
When from the smoking surface of the sea  
The gypsy lanterns of the moor-ild fled,  
And flickering went out ; and tardily  
The moonless nights dragged into sunless days, —  
Each night so like its mates in heaviness  
And each succeeding day so like the night,  
That to the yawning world of Nidaros  
The slowly trickling sand-glass on the shelf  
Seemed clogged in the throat, and the black bat of  
Time  
Clipt of its wings.

Oft in such straits as this,  
Like a barred dungeon-keep became the court, —  
Each kaemper prisoned by his own camp-fire,  
Each skipper all too safely left astrand,  
Each huntsman to his own hole bayed and barked  
By wolf-packs, famine-driven from the hills.  
Then, ever watchful, down upon them charged  
The Spirit of Unrest, the Quarrelsome,  
Sloth's ever-ready handmaid, — locks unkempt,

Tempests of passion in her eyes, — who sprang  
 With easy stride across that steed untamed,  
 The roaring North-Wind, fretting his white flanks  
 With bony thigh, and heel, and willowy scourge, —  
 And dropt into their midst. Unwelcome guest,  
 She pushed unbidden to their banquet-hall ;  
 And, planted ghostlike at the upper board,  
 A hollow-eyed and scowling seneschal,  
 Sucked the light breath of wick and smoking brand,  
 Unspiced the dishes, turned to dissonance  
 The flourish of the trumpet that foretold  
 Each change of platter ; and from every mouth,  
 Though full-fed and with laughter puckered, stole  
 All mirth and mask of it.

But ever then

Ere hate of fellowship and hate of all  
 Had time to mutter into voiced complaint  
 And thrust its clamor to the royal ear,  
 Would Magnus read it ambushed in the eye  
 And torpid tongue, and ready-witted speed  
 Slim pages to each chamber of his house,  
 Proclaiming, " Vesper being rung this night,  
 We will to guest-hall, and the skald shall sound  
 The masterful exploits of Harold's days ;"  
 Or " Lady Valborg's lips, by song-craft stirred,

Have to her harp a tender ballad taught ;"  
Or "He of Flanders with his jugglery  
Shall play the herbest and astound our ears ;"  
Or "With us lodge we a far-traveled guest,  
Late from our neighbor isle of Angle-Land,  
Whose tales of the last tournay, warming us,  
Shall deck with summer-glow our dingy walls,  
Shall filch from each all thought of present ill,  
Kindle the tinder of each ashen cheek,  
And with a youngling's ardor kiss away  
The frown from every forehead."

Then post-haste  
Throughout the skali, honeycombed and vast, —  
Itself a petty realm, shorn from the rest  
By stress of weather, — with light pattering feet  
And tongues untethered would the pages flit,  
Coursing the windy flights and passage-ways,  
Pushing unheralded in every room,  
E'en ladies' bower, their tossing yellow hair ;  
And summer would steal back to darkened eyes,  
And yawns and sighs to ready laughter yield.

Thus, one mid-winter time, when sleet and frost  
Beleaguering the palace-prison walls,  
So closely sat that few had ventured forth

forth

And leaned to listen for the twentieth time  
To some spent tale. And though impatient all,  
Each suddenly found much that must be said, —  
For time being afield, like pack unleashed  
All sped to join the chase, tongues running wild ;  
And whether rat or roebuck were the quest  
Mattered but little.

Garrulous the hour  
Ere from the threshold of the royal rooms  
Swept in the court and courtiers ; whereupon

With much ado of bench and buskined foot,  
Crushing sweet odor from the cedar sprays,  
All else arose ; and the high-constable  
With staff of office overtopped the din,  
Sounding the salutation : " Hail, all hail !  
Hail to King Magnus ! and our new-come guest ! "

Whereto, with mighty echo, as of billows  
That storm a rock-walled shore, adown the hall  
Resounded the fair words of welcome : " Hail !  
Hail to King Magnus ! and our new-come guest ! "

## II.

## THE SAGAMAN.

" Who, comrade, is the stranger that we greet ? "  
One to another whispered, " and wherefrom,  
This unkind month ( ' the howler ' ), hath he come,  
Dropt like a troll-stone ? "

        " Ketill, I am told,  
The golden-tongued, who, but a twelfth-night since,  
Trusting himself to horse the hoary sea  
That, raging, to the low clouds flung its froth,  
Left Floki's Isle with letters for this court ;

And in the whirlwind of the stormy sky  
Caught helpless by the hollow-handed gale,  
Flew whistling through the gloom of unseen snows,  
Helped by the hands that would unsaddle him,  
Till (praised be Rana !) though by wind and wave  
Shorn to the quick, until unkeeled he drave  
With strained and naked mast, he nathless made  
Our stormy Nidarness, and weathering that,  
Now houses with us."

"To this westerling  
Is Nidaros a stranger?"

"Aye, my friend ;  
But not so Ketill to our Nidaros,  
For every kaupskip flying from the west  
Hath sung his praises ; and now well, now ill,  
Oft harassed us with snatches of his lore,  
Which echoing hither in such broken strain,  
Yet tuneful still, to Lady Valborg's ears,  
Have by her mouth been cunningly recast  
In moving ballad and glad roundelay."

"Of lineage is he?"

"That he is, forsooth !

His veins still tingling with that noble strain,  
The blood of Snorri, Vinland's princeliest gift  
To Iceland. Knowst thou not the story old  
Of how the virgin West-world, being won,  
Conceived, and to our stalwart race bequeathed  
A man-child as its heir, — one Snorri? Nay?  
The more, then, wilt thou relish Ketill's words;  
For this, saith gossip, is the saga store  
The King will sue for."

Whereupon a pause,  
And there was stillness in the place of din, —  
Save, shrill without, the whistle of wild winds,  
Dashes of sleet, and pound of pebbly hail;  
While, warm within, the crackle of fat brands  
Widening their summer circle on the floor,  
Brake in between the drench and cheery cry  
Of mungat bubbling in oft-emptied bowls.

High on the dais, ringed by twinkling wicks,  
Sat Magnus, with Queen Thora by his side;  
At right of whom was Hakon, Norway's heir,  
And Hilda, the pale princess; to the left,  
Sir Axel Thordson, chiefest of the knights.  
Smiling response to many a friendly beck,  
With close beside him — trothed, and hair in snood,

And yet unclouded by her hovering doom —  
The Lady Valborg, loveliest of the court  
And most beloved.

“Comrades,” quoth the King,

“All hail to gentle Ketill, newly come  
From our far sister state of Floki’s Isle,  
Where in the stead of Ari, lately dead,  
He filleth worthily the abbot’s see.  
And if it be his pleasure, we, ere morn,  
Will quaff his spicy saga of the west,  
That wonder-land of Leif the Fortunate,  
Whereof our Lady Valborg oft hath sung,  
Painting the place a flowery paradise, —  
Where eager sunshine, not content with one,  
Smiled and caressed all seasons, each in turn.  
But doubtless, with her tinkling woman’s tongue,  
Oft chiming woe so it doth lovely seem,  
She hath but rung the pleasant harmonies,  
And left all wild or jangling tones untouched.

“To-night we would live o’er the troublous past,  
And be a part of it, courting the shade  
As well as sun-glow ; and full well we know —  
O modest master of the saga school —  
That mead-cup here to-night hath kissed no mouth



So fit to fling aside the veil as thine, —  
Thy voice a clarion that all ears commands,  
Thy thoughts brave watchwords, worthy to be  
    nicked  
Along our tables and by all men known.

“Then show us, Ketill, how through lifting fog  
First Biarni saw a new-born world leap up  
From the white breakers ; with thy ready lips  
Relate the lucky flight that gave to Leif  
An entrance to the gates unlocked before !  
Tell us how Thorwald, his first brother, fared ;  
And Thorstein, with sweet Gudrid, after-wed  
To Yarl Karlsefne ; and in course recall  
Those two most sombre flights yet further on,  
Led by that wolfish woman, born to taunt  
And chasten Erik for his youthful sin,  
Lustful Freydisa ! Fear not, modest guest,  
To weary us, for long ere thou wert come  
We learned the witchcraft of thine eloquence.  
We wait thy pleasure, and are thine to please !”

## III.

## THE SCHOOL OF THE PRIESTS.

“All hail ! O Norway’s king, and mine as well !  
And hail ! thy lady queen, thy kin, thy kith,  
Thy knights and ladies, and thy gentlemen !  
But standing forth in this fair company,  
Where every one is friend, and every friend  
O’errates the prowess of my priestly tongue,  
My words sound hollow in the lofty hall,  
And gladlier would I listen than relate.  
Yet I am thine till thou art tired of me,  
And lot me but a week of nights like this,  
And ere the yule-logs feeding these long hearths  
Make summer out of season, and gay groups  
Of jeweled dancers jingling o’er thy floors  
Usher more blithe amusement, — I will strive  
To fittingly unearth the buried past,  
To lend to it such color as I may ;  
And, as I may, to picture slowly forth  
In red and azure (as your ladies do,  
Pricking brave scenes upon their sampler webs),  
Half-glimpses from those fateful voyages six  
Of skipper Biarni and the dragon flock  
That, following him, sought nest-room for their  
broods.

“ But ye must fillip me whene’er your eyes  
Grow heavy or my discourse dull ; for I,  
Long loving the old road, grass-grown, though trod  
By many a stately ghost, may soon outpace  
Your patience, ambling thoughtlessly along,  
Nor note your lagging steps, till glancing back  
I find myself companionless, and ye  
Asleep among the hedges.

“ Iceland’s past  
Hath been my dream-coast, o’er whose breezy  
cliffs, —  
Like seabird glorying in a world-wide fief,  
Its will the only pilot of its course, —  
Have I sailed up and down the misty shore,  
Hovering whene’er I would, or hastening by ;  
And toward the daydawn climbing, have I lived  
That happier existence, all unvext  
By the dull nowadays, which bairns oft know,  
Ere the blue sky where late they trimmed for flight  
Hath faded from their eyes.

“ Seeking for text  
I do but stoop and loose one unbound leaf  
From Iceland’s storied scrolls. These, legend-  
wise,

All lived from lip to lip till Saemund came,  
Yclept the 'Learnéd,' who with wizard hand  
Nibbing a gray-goose pinion, gave, and said :  
'Thou Ketill, of the many beardless boys  
That call me master, art my most-beloved,  
Whose presence near at hand hath made me glad  
E'en when I looked not on thee, and whose eyes,  
Flashing with youth and smiling in my own  
Whene'er I smiled, have made mine own grow  
young.

To thee, then, I assign the hardest task ;  
To thee, high-born, of lordly heritage,  
And, likelier yet, of gentle breeding too, —  
A listener worthy of the subtlest tongue,  
Thyself apt-spoken and of dextrous quill,  
Precise in small things, patient in them all —  
(Your pardon, such were Saemund's words to  
me), —

To thee, whom I will seal my son and heir,  
To thee I set apart the proudest task.  
Come, Ketill, wed thy young wit unto mine,  
And fill an old man's cup ! My work thou kenst ;  
Draw closely to my side till thou canst feel  
The flutter of my pulse and read my thoughts ;  
And even as thou readest, teach thy quill  
To tell them to the parchment. Toiling thus,

As west winds full of music, from the hills  
Break up the banks of sea-fog, we will lift  
The curtain of forgetfulness, rebuild  
The crumbling ramparts of our Iceland's past ;  
And peopling these with men and womenfolk,  
Will pulse our current through their palsied veins  
And breathe into their nostrils, — till aroused,  
Heroes shall leap from their long dreamless sleep,  
And flinging up the face-bar of their helms  
Speak and instruct us !'

“ Well content was I,  
Loving my priestly master, whose pale face  
Shines ever yet before me ; and forthwith,  
With echoing feet we through the cloisters fared,  
Mingling our shadows with the streakéd shade  
That on the grassy close the columns cast, —  
And calling down the swallows, curve on curve  
Cutting the square of blue that smiled above.  
Then pushing wide the panel of a door,  
That hoarsely on its brazen hinges cried,  
We wended way into the scrivener's hall,  
High-roofed, and with a holy stillness filled ;  
Where 'neath the softened light of pictured panes  
We labored pleasantly, day out, day in,  
To give tongues to the parchments.

“ But before

My hand was weary or my goose-quills spent,  
More bowed was Saemund : and his manly voice,  
That erst was clear and mellow in its ring,  
Grew thin and treble. Oft he stopt for words,  
Or still repeated them, — the thought he tracked  
Flying before him like a hunted thing,  
That sails a little space and soft alights,  
But when you come, again lifts whirring wings.  
And one gray afternoon, as the great bell  
Boomed forth the vesper and the hour of rest,  
Lo ! in the middle of a phrase, my pen  
Still thrilling with his speech, he paused and ceased ;  
And when, after a space, I eyed askance,  
Thinking to find him buried in his books,  
Silent he sat, with chin upon his breast  
As though he slept.

“ But to that sudden sleep,

Alas ! my friends, no waking was foredoomed ;  
And when the tumult of the hour was past,  
And groping through the cloisters I crept back  
To the low desk, I found the room grown vast,  
I heard the west wind weeping at the eaves,  
And felt the wings of death still winnowing  
The night-air ; and upon my knees I breathed

A broken prayer, and sobbed there in the dark.  
Then rising, to the blinking wax I gave  
A spark of life ; and struggling with my grief,  
Shore off the chapter where my hand had dropt,  
With the one word, then taken first to heart,  
A simple 'Finis.'

“ Pitiful it was  
To see the task thus broken in its midst,  
But well I wist that he would have replied,  
In that all-brave, all-hopeful strain of his :  
'Nay, boy, not pitiful, else all were so  
In this world's field. The cause it is that counts,  
And not one standard-bearer less or more.  
Our ripest work must hereto come at last,  
For none, however painfully he strive,  
Hath ever yet been able at the end  
To smile and say, Now is my work complete,  
And I full satisfied ! But well it is  
If one as he lies down to sleep can sigh :  
Unfinished still the journey, still afar  
The height toward which I toil ; but God be praised  
For giving me the strength thus much to gain !'

“ So Saemund's book was closed ; and though full  
fain,

I could not for a twelve-month find the heart  
To loose the hasp that bound it, and turn o'er  
The painted pages.

“Some moons after that  
Came to me learned Ari, Saemund's friend,  
Versed in the mystery of the Roman rune,  
With this upon his lips : ‘His wish would be,  
Who from his labor lieth now at rest,  
That we who loved him lift and carry on  
The load he late let fall. Sole heir art thou  
To his rich lore, and ere some new mischance  
Shall whirl and scatter to the windy night  
The leaves of Saemund's knowledge, let us speed  
To lock their wealth in worthy cabinets.’

“Thus, the new abbot aiding, — who, alas !  
Hath lately followed Saemund to his rest, —  
The treasure grew, the famed Landnama-Book,  
From sun to sun still rounding into form  
As others to it leave their fresh bequests ;  
Which to the gaze of Northmen yet to come  
Will track the footprints of our centuried past,  
And where they last would challenge, find them  
                    friends  
And old-time fullness of their new-formed faiths.”



## IV.

## THE SAGA OF THE WEST.

“Such were the tasks wherein my youth was schooled.

But what I now will tell is still unwrit,  
The precious heirloom of our olden house,  
Through three half-centuries from mouth to mouth  
Of first-born unto first in turn bequeathed,  
Until to me it latest falls : — a tale  
That is no romaunt, grandam-rhymed, to make  
A child big-mouthed, — no skaldic trick of tongue  
To tickle a yarl's pride and tempt from him  
A singing purse ; but history's own shield,  
Dinted and scored with many a speaking rune, —  
Left by my father Ranglat unto me,  
And by his mother Steinunn unto him,  
And by her father Snorri unto her,  
And by his sire Karlsefne unto him,  
Who left its story woven on his walls  
In pictured groups and runic characters,  
And carven on the shoulders of his bench,  
That none might lose or twist it.

" Thus it lived.

But Yarl Karlsefne told it not as I,  
Who like a prattling parrot do but play  
The mouthpiece to resound another's strain,  
For he was one of the brave skipper band,  
Whereof I speak, who in his dragon sailed  
To people Vinland, and in chiefest deeds  
Was one of the chief doers.

" Drink with me,

My friends, to his fair name, my kinsman proud,  
This Thorfinn, clept Karlsefne or 'The Manly,'—  
This worthy Thorfinn, Iceland's merchant prince,  
And hero of all heroes in my tale,  
My Vinland Saga."

Tall, and still afoot,

Bent Ketill, as a house-carle brimmed his cup ;  
Puffed the light foam aside to wet his lips, —  
Tilted and drained it.

Then once more the King :

" First at thy ease be cushioned, guest of ours !  
Behold thy hearers ! — even Valborg here,  
Whose comfort most we reckon of, next to thine,  
Hoping that she may second thee in song,

Lieth like nestled kitten 'neath the arm  
Of Axel, her betrothed. Rest thou at ease !  
For making thee our guest, our house is thine,  
Our arms, our underlings, our friends thy friends, —  
Our foes thy foes, if thou wilt father them, —  
Thine whate'er cheer the famished wolf of Time  
Hath in our cellars left unbroken still,  
And every wish of thine, our wish and will."

---

THE END.

*Beyond each hill-top others rise,  
Like ladder-rungs, toward loftier skies :  
Each halt is but a breathing space  
For stirrup-cup and fresher pace ;  
Till who dare say, ere night descend,  
There can be, ever, such thing as End !*

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